

The Rise of Mesopotamian City-States

What Happened in History?

Based on current available archaeological evidence, this is what historians believe happened in each of these events in history.

FOOD SHORTAGE:

Around 5000 B.C.E., the food shortage in the Zagros foothills may have forced people to move in search of more land to settle and farm. People gradually moved onto the Mesopotamian plains located below the foothills and settled along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Farming was difficult on the new land, but people were able to cultivate crops and build new settlements, which eventually grew into villages. In addition to farming, people also fished in the rivers and swamps to help maintain a stable food supply.

UNCONTROLLED WATER SUPPLY:

To provide a year-round supply of water for their crops, some members of the villages on the Mesopotamian plains designed an irrigation system. People dug ditches and built complex waterways that could direct water from the rivers to farmers' fields, some of them several miles away. Alongside the rivers, farmers also built up the rivers' natural earth walls, or *levees*, to protect villages from flooding.

IRRIGATION SYSTEM:

Some scholars believe that farmers from different villages on the Mesopotamian river plains cooperated to maintain the complex irrigation system. People may have joined village work teams to clean and repair irrigation canals, reservoirs, and dams. Although conflicts likely arose over the amount of water each village received, many villages gradually formed strong ties as they worked together to maintain the irrigation system.

ATTACKS BY NEIGHBORS:

By 5000 B.C.E., Sumerian cities were constantly fighting over water usage. People built thick walls around their cities to protect themselves from attack and built strong gates at the cities' entrances. Cities also gradually grew larger and more highly organized, with organized armies and systems of government. This new form of a city and its surrounding villages and farmlands is called a *city-state*. City-state members were almost always prepared for war. They each appointed a "big man," or *lugal*, to lead the city-state during times of emergency warfare. The *lugal* eventually gained power and eventually gained power and began to rule the city-state permanently as king.